



The **Methodist** Church

Nottingham North East Circuit - Sunday 27th December 2020



This short act of worship, based on the service which would have been held at Church today, has been prepared for you by Rev John Wiseman, to use at home. If you are well enough, why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

I have included some links to allow you to access versions of the hymns / songs / music via YouTube

Let's continue by singing : STF 213

Opening prayer

In our times of darkness, Christ comes with his light. In the midst of our loneliness, Christ comes to walk with us. In our experience of loss, Christ comes to share our pain, in our times of emptiness, Christ comes to fill us.

In our experience of brokenness, Christ comes to hold us. In our times of delight and despair, of joy and sorrow, of faith and doubt....Christ still comes, for me and for you. No matter who we are or what we have done, Christ comes.

Heavenly Father, we praise you for all you have shown in Jesus. Now we know that you are not far away. We thank you that though we cannot see you, you have promised no matter who or what we are, no matter what we have done or failed to do, you will be very near to each and every one of us

We praise you for the carols we sing and the joy we share in celebrating the arrival of Jesus.

Forgive us Father, if we spent so much time preparing to enjoy ourselves that we forget those who will have no joy this Christmas. Forgive us that as we decorate our homes we forget those who are homeless. Forgive us that as we welcome the baby in the manger we sometimes forget he is the man on the cross. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus.

Amen

©Rev David Clowes 40 prayers for the Christmas season 2020.

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in the dark street shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God, the King
And peace to men on earth

How silently, how silently
The wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven
No ear may hear His coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive Him still
The dear Christ enters in

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born in us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
Oh, come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Immanuel!

This morning's reading Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Let's sing again, a new song but to the familiar tune of Away in a manger

A new father, awestruck; a mother so mild;
A stable; a manger; a dear, newborn child
God, as we imagine that family so blessed,
We sometimes forget they were poor and
oppressed.

A woman considered to have no real worth
Said, yes! She would bear your own Son here
on earth.

We hear her bold singing! Her faithful words
soar:

"God humbles the rich and God lifts up the
poor."

As Joseph and Mary began a new home,
They suffered oppression from rulers in Rome.
Then, fleeing from Herod to save their son's
life,
They looked for a land free from violence and
strife.

We hear in our own day the cries of the poor;
We see in Aleppo the terror of war.
In women and children and men who must
flee,
We glimpse, Lord, your life as a young
refugee.

When some say that only the wealthy have
worth,
O God, we recall where you lived here on
earth.

May we in your church serve the poor and
distressed;
For, working for justice, we give you our best.
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www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGY6Yk0q6T8

Today's message.

Quite often at Christmas our focus can be on Mary and Jesus, with Mary pondering in her heart all that was happening to her. Today we shine the spotlight on the other parent there in the stable, quite possibly even more terrified...Joseph, the new Dad.

The shepherds had returned to the hillside. Mary had retired inside to be attended too by the women of the inn. Even the animals had settled down for the night. And Joseph sat alone in the darkness. Well not quite alone. He had his thoughts to keep him company.

Sitting there at the foot of the manger, staring in wonder at the child fast asleep, Joseph's head spun. The past nine months, well he had never seen all that coming. It had been a rollercoaster with so many ups and downs, twists and turns, uplifting highs and despairing lows. It was almost as if it had happened to someone else, only it hadn't. It was almost as if it wasn't real, and yet the sight before him told him it was the realest thing he had ever experienced.

He had been filled with such happiness the day his engagement to Mary had been announced. He had accepted that his family would arrange a marriage for him, after all that was the accepted custom, but he never thought it would be to Mary. He had to admit he didn't know her well, hardly at all in fact, but what he did know he liked. And what's more she seemed pleased with the news too. Not that such a feeling lasted long. Joseph felt his shoulders tense and his emotions stir as he recalled the moment his happiness was shattered, shattered forever he had thought by three simple words. 'Joseph I'm pregnant'

Joseph had been angry. Joseph had been disappointed. Joseph had been hurt. Joseph had been ready to divorce her. I mean would

you have believed her story about an angel, about being blessed, about God's son? The rest of the village didn't that's for sure. Tongues started to wag, fingers started to point, gossip and rumour started to run riot. And Joseph had started to believe them. Until that visitor appeared. That angel, appearing in a dream, confirming that what Mary was saying, as unbelievable as it sounded, was true. And that he needed to help her through it all.

'Help her through it'...the briefest of smiles emerged and spread across Joseph's face. Help her! He was supposed to have been the strong one and yet at the crucial points it had been Mary who had offered him support and encouragement. It was Mary who had come back from visiting her cousin Elizabeth with such a sense of peace and calmness about the whole thing. It had been Mary who had reminded him that they were not alone in all this. It had been Mary who kept reassuring him that it was all part of a much bigger plan. God's plan!

It had even been Mary's suggestion that they travelled together to Bethlehem for this census. He couldn't even get that right. Couldn't even manage to find them somewhere to stay despite having relatives in the town. Every bed was occupied. Or so they said. Joseph suspected otherwise. And so they had ended up here. Here in this stable. 'What an inauspicious start to a life' he thought. What kind of a man am I? What kind of a husband? What kind of a father!

And as for the past few hours well, who would have thought it. Shepherds and sages stumbling into the stable, all seeking to see Jesus. Such different people finding something in common. Only of course what or should I say, who they found, wasn't common at all. The angels had told the shepherds that the child they sought was special. As for the Magi, well all their scientific knowledge of the stars had told them, that this new birth would have world changing consequences. Joseph could only marvel at such ideas.

A single shaft of starlight suddenly pierced the gloom, illuminating the child that was the centre of all this fuss. Gently Joseph picked

him up. No more than a few pounds yet it felt as if he held the weight of the whole world in his hands. His son and yet not his son. 'How on earth am I supposed to be a father to God's son?' Joseph sighed.

How am I going to explain even some of the mysteries of life, when you are the biggest mystery of life itself? What lullabies am I going to use to sing back to sleep someone who taught the angels their harmonies? What am I going to be able to teach someone who knows all the answers even before I ask any of the questions? How am I supposed to explain the story of your faith, when it is in fact your story, your history, written by you about you? How do I play childhood games with you, the master tactician who is always looking five steps ahead? How am I going to make you laugh, when you will know the punch line even before I say it? How am I expected to feed someone who will nourish millions, clothe someone who has thrown the star into the sky? How can I protect someone who can silence the storm with a single command?

The child stirred in Joseph's arms and began to cry. 'Ssshhh, ssshhh,' Joseph said almost instinctively, rocking the baby back and forth in his arms, 'It's alright, I'm here.' Soothed by the sound of his voice and the sense of being safe, the child's cries stopped and opening its eyes for the briefest of moments met Joseph's gaze. And Joseph could have sworn he saw his son smile. His son. Suddenly it all made sense and the words of the angel came rushing back to him...'Do not be afraid!'

And Joseph suddenly realised that he wasn't. He was still nervous, still felt under prepared, still not sure if **HE** was up to **THIS** task, still had 1001 question he wanted to know the answers to. But he was no longer afraid.

Joseph held his son tightly in his arms, ready to protect him with all the strength that he possessed. His son, who was now fast asleep again, oblivious to everything. 'I might not be able to give you much,' Joseph began, 'Not my name, my looks or the colour of my eyes, but I can give you one thing.'

Joseph lifted up the sleeping baby and kissed Jesus gently on the forehead. 'And that my son....is my love.'

Prayers of Intercessions

We pray for the issues that have dominated
our news headlines during this past week

We pray for all new parents wondering if they
are up to the task

We pray for all those facing uncertain futures

We pray for our brothers and sisters in faith at
this time

We join together to say the words of the Lord's
prayer...Our Father.....

**Let us conclude this act of worship by
singing In a Feed Box, In a Stable to the
tune "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"**

In a feed box, in a stable,
Jesus slept upon the hay;
So, our God, you came among us,
Bringing peace on earth that day.
Beautiful upon the mountain! Christ,
you bring us God's shalom;
May we share your love and justice
In each land and town and home.

In a shelter, poor and homeless,
Sleeps a child upon her bed;
In a basement hides a family,
Bombs exploding overhead.
Jesus, you knew want and hunger;
Your own family fled the sword.
May we see you, may we hear you,
In each one oppressed or poor.

In the church, we seek your presence;
Prince of Peace, you meet us here:
See! A person seeking shelter.
See! Another filled with fear.
See! A world where lives are broken;
Give us strength and help us care,
Till our love for every neighbour
Fills each thought and act and prayer.

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A blessing...

Equip us and enable us to live out the roles
and tasks you call us to perform through the
power of your Holy Spirit and in the name of
Jesus. Amen

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOqCerCenIU